

Fabio Perselli's multi-racial and multi-national production of the British English language premiere of Pirandello's 'LIOLA' for Internationalist Theatre (formerly known as New Internationalist Theatre) at the Bloomsbury Theatre, London in July 1982 drew different responses from London critics

Harold Atkins for the Daily Telegraph :

'It (the play) opened with a satiety of women's gossip, some of it not very easy to follow, with the various accents of the New Internationalist Theatre. But it picked up wonderfully.'

Rosalind Carne for the Financial Times:

"..do we really need this peculiar medley of Italian accents for the English premiere? The problem is compounded by the commitment of the New Internationalist Theatre company to a multi-national cast"

Deceit in a Sicilian village

By HAROLD ATKINS

AT FIRST one felt that the revival of Pirandello's first play, "Liola," about deceitful goings on in a Sicilian village, at the Bloomsbury Theatre was likely to make heavy going.

It opened with a satiety of women's gossip, some of it not very easy to follow, with the various accents of the New Internationalist Theatre. But picked up wonderfully.

By the second act it was bouncing along in top gear in its new translation. Pirandello's remote 1916 Sicilian period was paying dividends again.

It doesn't, of course, show the master in full course. His concern with the blurred nature of human consciousness and the illusions of happiness is for the future. Here we have merely a funny comedy of an old man who cannot produce an heir by his young wife being deceived (twice) by a conceited young rascal who can produce any number—and two for him. No sooner has he arranged to recognise one child by a village

girl to restore his self-respect than his wife comes along with another.

The pleasures of the performance, with its occasional songs based on ballads and tarantellas, lay in the village vitality, the lusty folk element, the virulent yet ultimately good-hearted gossip dear to the Italian heart.

Many Italians in the audience found it much to their taste, and so did the others, when they had got used to the rough village confrontations.

Jack De Filippo gave us a grotesquely self preening coxcomb in Liola, rather larger than life and Arthur Nightingale was the farcical old man. Kristine Landon-Smith was Tuzza the naughty girl and Yvonne Nicholson the initially disappointed young wife.

There were some excellent performances as the various aunts and relatives and the children romped about deliciously. A very good evening of an unusual kind, best suited to those who know Italian life.

Director, Fabio Perselli.

Liola!/Bloomsbury Theatre

Rosalind Carne

Pirandello's early comedy was born of the writer's own love and knowledge of his native Sicily. First performed in 1916 in local dialect, the specific location is integral to the drama. But do we really need this peculiar medley of Italian accents for the English première? The problem is compounded by the commitment of the New Internationalist Theatre company to a multinational cast. English, German, Sicilian and Italian actors produce widely differing versions of the Latin lilt. The company's aims may be commendable, but this is one play which calls for homogeneity of accent.

Nor is this the only difficulty in Fabio Perselli's scrappy, if energetic production. Pirandello tends to crowd his stage, but in this case the mood should be joyous and light. Instead we are treated to much exaggerated scurrying from perky little peasant girls, dampened by clumsy choreography and an unexceptional score by Glyn Powell and Victoria Lyne.

Still, there are moments when the playwright's mastery of thought and language emerges through the chaos, notably during the crucial confrontations of Act 2. Old Zio Simone still needs an heir after four years of marriage. He has become a laughing stock but manages to save face by claim-

ing the unborn child of young Tuzza, who has been seduced by Liola, the village Don Juan. Since the duplicity is the road to survival his own wife is persuaded to play the game, and when she too becomes pregnant by Liola, Zio Simone is quite prepared to return to the nest.

These complications unfold with ease and rapidity against a simple set of two modest wooden facades and a ground strewn with baskets. We get a sense of

a working community, with the women doing most of the work, and two convincing performances, from Yvonne Nicholson as Mita, the wife, and Lucy Woolley as Liola's mother. Jack De Filippo shares his the hero's nationality, but only a fraction of his dynamism, particularly in the group scenes.

It's good to see the forerunner of so much later theatrical wizardry, but I would have welcomed a more forceful and integrated treatment.